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THE RED CROSS

IN CHARGE OF

JANE A. DELANO, R.N.

Chairman of the National Committee on Red Cross Nursing Service

THE EASTLAND DISASTER

BY MINNIE H. AHRENS, R.N.

The *Eastland*, a large excursion steamer, was engaged on July 24 by the Hawthorne Club, the membership of which is made up of the employees of the Western Electric Company, for their annual picnic at Michigan City, Indiana. Four steamers had been chartered and the *Eastland* was the first to receive passengers. By 7 o'clock, the steamer was loaded to its capacity. The gang plank was taken in when about 2500 people were aboard. The lines were about to be loosened and a tug had arrived to tow the steamer into the lake, when it began to list. Before the boat was loosened from the dock, she slowly rolled over toward the river, filling with water. The weight of the water and passengers caused the steamer to roll on her side resulting in the loss of over 800 lives. Life-saving crew and tugs were soon on the scene. Men jumped into the river to assist the drowning and many of those reached early were saved.

As soon as the chairman of the Red Cross Committee learned of the accident, with one nurse who was in her office, she went over to where the disaster occurred, there finding three nurses already hard at work. Blankets and cots had arrived from the large stores. Blankets were being spread on the side walk and bodies laid on them, as they were brought up out of the river. Immediately upon arrival and as soon as it was possible to reach a telephone, the registrar at the Central Directory and all public health nursing organizations were communicated with and asked to send nurses as quickly as possible. As they arrived they reported to the chairman for instruction. This was true, whether they were Red Cross nurses or not, and occurred before it was possible to have any plan of organization. The nurses worked on the bridge and in the street in the pouring rain until about 12 o'clock, when plans were made to take the rescued into Reid, Murdock's large wholesale grocery building. This firm turned the entire building over to the workers.

The work of resuscitation was a hopeless undertaking, as practically every one brought in after 9 o'clock was beyond assistance, although each one was worked over between fifteen and twenty minutes. As soon as the workers got under cover, the doctors began asking for hot applications. This meant hard work as the wringing out of hot blankets is no easy task. Very soon we had hot application stations established. A corps of men saw to it that pails of hot water were kept ready, two nurses being placed in charge of each station who were instructed to see to it that hot applications were ready as required.

By 1 o'clock there were at least a hundred nurses working, each of whom deserves hearty praise for the manner in which she responded and followed instructions. The only instruction which they failed to follow was that they should go home when they were exhausted and drenched to the skin. Few were resuscitated, but still all felt that perhaps the next one might be revived. At 5 o'clock it was decided that doctors and nurses could be of no further service.

The 2d Regiment Armory was turned into a morgue. After conference with Mr. J. J. O'Connor, director of the Central Division of the American Red Cross, it was decided to establish an emergency hospital at the Armory to take care of the friends and relatives who would come in to identify their dead. They began taking bodies to this morgue about 6 o'clock but did not open it to the public until 9 o'clock. Five Red Cross nurses were assigned to duty for Saturday night and such a spectacle as these nurses beheld, as they entered this place of the dead with between five and six hundred bodies on the floor! Nurses were placed on six hour duty, and the first night between forty and fifty persons were cared for. The emergency hospital at the morgue was continued until the fourth day, when there seemed no further need for nurses.

It is at such a time that nurses realize and appreciate the value of their Red Cross nursing service. Without organization it would have been impossible to have had such coöperation. It gave an opportunity to find out their short-comings and further needs. Among other things, the nurses generally felt the lack of first-aid instruction.